

WRPR/LNGT 110- English Grammar: Concepts and Controversies (Spring 2016)

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Class Description

In this course we will study the structure of the English language, learning key terms and strategies for analyzing English syntax. We will explore English grammar from both prescriptive and descriptive perspectives and examine its relevance to language policy, linguistic prejudice, and English education. Readings will be drawn from a variety of texts, including *Rhetorical Grammar* (2009), *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* (2006), *The Fight for English* (2006), and *Verbal Hygiene* (2012). This course is relevant to students wanting to increase their own knowledge of the English language, as well as to those seeking tools for English teaching and/or research.

Course Overview

The first half of the course is devoted primarily to learning about the structure of English. We will learn to analyze English sentences using grammatical terminology, and students will be assessed on their knowledge and application of concepts. We will also engage various perspectives on the question, Why does grammar matter? Students will be asked to draw on their existing knowledge of and experience with English grammar instruction and usage.

The second half of the course explores complex issues related to English grammar, such as...

- Language regulation, policy, and standardization
- Prescriptivism, moralism, “verbal hygiene,” and linguistic prejudice
- The influence of globalization, migration, and technology on the English language
- The role of grammar in English education (both in the US and abroad)

We will explore these issues through course readings, class discussion, a group presentation, and an individual position paper. Near the end of the course, we will focus on synthesizing and building on what has been learned in the semester. Each student will complete a research project, which will be presented to the class in a short oral presentation, as well as in a written report. (See details later in the syllabus).

Required Reading List (All books are available at the Middlebury bookstore.)

1. Kolln, M., and Funk, R. (2011/2012). *Understanding English Grammar* (9th Ed). Pearson.
2. Crystal, D. (2006/7). *The Fight for English: How Language Pundits Ate, Shot, and Left*. Oxford University Press.
3. Cameron, D. (2012 or earlier edition). *Verbal Hygiene*. Routledge.

Other materials for this course will be available online via Moodle ([go/coursehub](#)).

Expectations

Academic community is an important aspect of this course; cultivating that community requires the active presence and participation of each member. You are expected to attend all classes on time, prepared to engage actively in course activities and discussion. Unexcused absences and late or missed assignments will be penalized. In the event of illness, please notify me (via email or phone) *before* the class that you will be missing. Multiple absences could have an adverse effect on your final course grade.

Grading Breakdown

- ❖ Participation (online and in-class, including student-led discussion) and HW exercises from Kolln/Funk= 20%
- ❖ Short Papers (two, 2-3 pages each)= 15%
- ❖ Quizzes (two) = 20% total (Quiz dates are on course calendar).
- ❖ Position paper (4-5 pp.)= 20%
- ❖ Independent Project (4-5 pp. report, plus in-class mini-presentation) = 25%

Formatting for Written Work

Unless specified otherwise, written assignments should be double-spaced, 12-point font (Times New Roman), with 1-inch margins. APA citation style is preferred, but other formats may be accepted upon student request. All work should include the honor code statement.

Communication and Support

Communication and respect are very important to our course. I attempt to return all phone calls and emails within 24 hours, and expect the same of my students. Your feedback is essential to the success of this course. I will give you opportunities to tell me how the course is going, both in-class and

anonymously, but I appreciate hearing from you at any point about your needs and experiences. If you encounter difficulties with any course material or assignments, please contact me early and often, so that I can help support you.

If you have a disability or learning issue of any kind that might impact your studies, please communicate with me and/or the ADA office, so that we can make a plan to accommodate you. See <http://www.middlebury.edu/campuslife/diversity/ada/> for more information.

We also have a Peer Writing Tutor who has a solid knowledge of English grammar, and can help you with your written work in this course. Please feel free to contact her throughout the semester as needed: **Maggie Nazer** -mnazer@middlebury.edu. (You may also use drop-in tutors at CTLR).

OVERVIEW OF MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS (more details will be provided in-class)

Quizzes

Each quiz will assess your understanding of course terminology and concepts. Quizzes may include fill-in-the-blank, matching, and short answer questions, as well as error analysis and other application activities. You will be given a study guide before each quiz, but the best way to prepare is to be present and engaged in class, and to complete all homework assignments.

Short Papers (2-3 pages)

These papers give you a chance to practice writing, and to connect to/reflect on what you've been learning in class.

- **“Grammar Autobiography”**: Describe your past experiences with learning and using prescriptive grammar, and your current views on the topic. Questions to consider:
 - Have you studied English grammar explicitly? What was the experience like for you? (If not, do you regret it?)
 - Did you have any teachers (or friends/family members) who were “sticklers?” What impact did they have on your views about prescriptive grammar?
 - Have you ever experienced linguistic insecurity in regards to spoken or written grammar?
 - Do you ever judge people for improper use of grammar?
 - Where do you fall on the “purist” vs. “progressive” spectrum re: grammar?

- **“Critiquing Crystal”**: Your goal for this paper is to present one critique of Crystal’s *The Fight for English*. You may wish to right a traditional “response paper” as yourself, responding as a student thinking about his work. Or, you can turn this into written role play by choosing an

alternate 'persona' (written identity), genre, and audience for your work.

Some possibilities for this 2nd option include...

- Lynn Truss writing an editorial, email, or scholarly essay responding to Crystal's criticisms of her work
- A scholar or teacher from the U.S. contrasting their context with that presented by Crystal (who is from the U.K.)
- A teacher, employer, journalist, etc. arguing that Crystal overlooks certain aspects of the "real-world" of language use

Position Paper (4-5 pages)

In this paper, you will take a position on a controversial question that has arisen in our readings and/or class discussion. Possible questions include:

1. Are the linguistic purists (and/or "pundits" or "sticklers") right to place such a high emphasis on grammatical correctness? Is judgment based on grammar/language use ever justified?
2. How important is standardization of spelling, grammar, etc.? Does (Can) linguistic variation lead to inability to communicate?
3. How much emphasis should be placed on teaching prescriptive grammar in public schools?
4. Is texting (or another media trend) ruining the English language?
5. How important and useful is politically-correct and/or gender-inclusive language?
6. When is censorship (e.g., of profane or obscene language) justified?
7. (You could also take a position on one of the other arguments made by Crystal or Cameron.)

Independent Research Project (5 minute "mini-presentation," plus 4-5 page report)

The goal of this project is to give you an opportunity to deepen your course learning through primary research. You (and possibly a partner) will choose a particular grammar error or grammar-related issue, and gauge the reactions/opinions of other Middlebury students. This is **NOT** a library research project, in which you summarize findings from secondary sources (other people's research/argument). Rather, it requires that you gather original data via **one** of the following methods:

- Survey (minimum 10 participants)
- Interviews (3-5 participants)
- Focus Group (8-10 participants—this one can be tricky!)
- Social media (Twitter, Facebook, Middblog, etc.)

In your individual written report, you will answer the following questions:

1. What did you do for your research and Why?
2. What did you expect to find?
3. What did you actually find?
4. What are the implications of your findings?

5. What did you learn overall from doing this project?

We will discuss a number of possible topics and approaches for this topic, but some examples of errors that could be investigated are as follows: *who vs. whom, split infinitives, missing articles, ending sentences in prepositions, incorrect spelling, use of "textese," punctuation errors* (e.g. its vs. it's, comma splice). Another alternative would be to collect data in relation to one of the controversial issues discussed for the Position Paper (see above).

Tentative Course Schedule (Spring 2016)

NOTE: Daily HW assignments from Kolln/Funk will be given out in class.

Feb 16 (T)- Course introduction and Overview. Begin discussing key terms: *prescriptive vs. descriptive grammar, grammarians vs. linguists, linguistic purists, linguistic insecurity, rhetorical grammar*. Self-assessment of basic grammar terms (e.g., in Kolln/Funk Ch 2).

Feb 18 (Th)- Kolln/Funk Ch 1 and 2, plus HW exercises: _____.
Review of basic grammar terminology.
Discuss Short Paper 1: "Grammar Autobiography"

Due Sun Feb 21 (on Moodle): Draft of Short Paper 1 (Grammar Autobiography)

Feb 23 (T)- Kolln/Funk Ch 3 HW exercises: _____. Possible additional reading.
Discuss themes from Short Paper 1.

Feb 25 (Th)- Kolln/Funk Ch 3 and 4.

Due Sun Feb 28 (if needed) Revision of Short Paper 1 (email to Prof S.).

Mar 1 (T)- Kolln/Funk Ch 5 and part of Ch 15. Review for quiz

Mar 3 (Th)- **Quiz 1.** (primarily on Kolln/Gray Ch 1-5).

Mar 8 (T)- Kolln/Funk Ch 6 and 7. HW exercises: _____. Prologue to Crystal.
Also browse online excerpts from Truss's *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* (link on Moodle).

Mar 10 (Th)- Kolln/Funk Ch 8 and 9. Crystal Ch 1-5. Possible HW exercises: _____

Mar 15 (T)- Kolln/Funk Ch 10 and 16. HW exercises: _____. Crystal Ch 6-12.

Mar 17 (Th)- Class role-play: Purists vs. Progressives. Discuss quiz 2.

Due on Sun 3/20- Quiz 2 (take-home, submit on Moodle)

Mar 22 (T)- Crystal 13-18. (Possible student-led discussion). Kolln/Funk Ch 11-12 (skim).
Discuss position paper.

Mar 24 (Th) Crystal 19-23. (Possible student-led discussion). Kolln/Funk Ch 13-14 (skim)
Workshop ideas for position paper.

Spring Break: Mar 27-April 3

(Before next class: Work on position paper. Start reading Cameron.)

Apr 5 (T)- Cameron Ch 1. Peer review outlines or first drafts of position paper.

Apr 7 (Th)- *Class cancelled*. Out-of-class peer review (in-person or online) of position papers.

Due Saturday 4/9: Full Draft of Position Paper (Moodle).

Apr 12 (T)- Education (UK): Crystal 28-30. Cameron Ch 3. (Possible student-led discussion)

Apr 14 (Th)- Education (US): Kolln & Hancock and Delpit (on Moodle). (Possible student-led discussion)

*Meetings w/ SS and/or peer tutor this week re: Position Paper.

[Fri Apr 15: URO Student Research Symposium]

Due Sun 4/17: Revised draft of Position Paper (Moodle).

Apr 19 (T)- Political Correctness: Cameron Ch 4. (Student-led discussion).

Discuss final project.

April 21 (Th)- Censorship/profanity (readings on Moodle) (Student-led discussion).

Due Sun Apr 24: Proposal for Independent Project (Moodle)

Apr 26 (T)- Media/Technology (readings on Moodle). (Student-led discussion).

April 28 (Th)- Topic and readings TBD – (e.g., Gender and language—Cameron Ch 6 and/or video of her talk at Midd). Possible class debate.

*Meetings w/ SS this week re: Independent Project

May 3 (T)- Writing Workshop. Continue with Cameron Ch 6.

May 5 (Th)- Writing Workshop/Peer Review. Cameron afterward. Possible additional.

Due Sun May 8: Draft of Independent Project Report

May 10 (T)- Student mini-presentations. Writing Workshop

May 12 (Th)- Student mini-presentations (cont'd). Course wrap-up.

Due May 16 (Mon)- Final draft of Independent Project Report. (Extensions available upon request).